REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN

BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

Feb. 24, 2016

It's my pleasure to be here today. Thank you, Brenda (Manuel), for your office's hard work on this event.

You know, each year I'm amazed at all the progress we make. I've often said I could never have imagined that I would be asked by the First African American President to be the first African American leader of NASA, but here we are today -- with a number of wonderful Black astronauts who have flown in space, a diverse group of new astronauts and thousands more applying in our last call. We even see the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields slowly but surely becoming more diverse – though all too slowly.

We're standing on the shoulders of giants – some of we'll recognize here today.

Some worked in our space program decades ago when they hardly saw anyone who looked like them and some are from more recent years whose hard work helped cement our progress and enabled us to look toward an even brighter future.

I'm talking about you, Leland Melvin. Whose tenure as our head of Education inspired countless youth to pursue a STEM career and whose work continues to enlarge our field. I'm talking about Katharine Johnson and George Carruthers, to whom we'll give special recognition today for pursuing the dream of better understanding our world and our place in it and doing it no matter how many people may have told them they didn't belong.

Some of my role models were the Tuskegee Airmen and the Montford Point Marines and my father and uncles, who had served proudly in the armed services.

I'm delighted that here with us today are Mr. David Kapple, historian for the Atlanta Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen and Airman Brew Graham, an original Tuskegee Airman who served with the 99th Pursuit Squadron in Italy during World War II. Thank you, Airman Graham for your service, and you, Mr. Kapple, for keeping his story alive for the benefit of today's and future generations.
I was also fortunate to have role models like the remarkable Dr. Ronald McNair, who helped me overcome my doubts and pursue a career in the astronaut corps before he lost his life aboard Challenger. But Ron's legacy, like all we celebrate today, continues.

Things are different today than when I was growing up in segregated South Carolina, but the truth of the matter is, as far as we have come, we still have a ways to travel.

Our country is moving forward on two Journeys: a Journey to Social Justice and a Journey to Mars.

So each of you here today and watching at the NASA centers, has a role in the history that we celebrate – roles in making it real right now, expanding it and in helping those who come behind us forge an even better world.

Our Journey to Mars will take American astronauts to the Red Planet in the 2030s, and let me assure you it will be Americans of all races and genders.

Today's children are a part of what I like to call the "space generation." They are growing up in times when astronauts from

many nations fly together in space every single day. An American younger than 15 hasn't known a single day when astronauts from different countries weren't living and working together aboard the International Space Station.

They're also a generation that hasn't known a time when women and people of color were not part of international crews in space.

To send humans to Mars, we need to give every member of this space generation the opportunity to reach for their potential in whichever field they choose to pursue. We need them all, and celebrations like we're having here today help open that door and give us the energy and the aspiration to make that journey a truly American journey.

Thank you again to all the pioneers who have gotten us to where we are today. I pledge that we will honor your legacy and extend it to future generations. Thank you all for being here.

RECOGNITIONS

George Carruthers

Dr. George Carruthers, a physicist and scientist, invented, among other things, the ultraviolet camera, or spectrograph, which was used by NASA in the 1972 Apollo 16 flight to the Moon to reveal the mysteries of space and Earth's atmosphere. In addition, his telescope and image converter was used to identify molecular hydrogen in space.

Dr. Carruthers built his first telescope at the age of 10. He earned his doctorate in aeronautical and astronautical engineering at the University of Illinois in 1964 and began working at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory. He has helped us look at our universe in a new way by his scientific work, and has helped us as a nation see ourselves anew as well.

Dr. Carruthers received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation in 2011 and he was inducted into the National Inventors" Hall of Fame. It's my pleasure today to recognize Dr. George Carruthers.

Katherine Johnson

You know, Katherine G. Johnson is one of those people without whom there might not have been a NASA, or a moon landing. It was one of my greatest thrills as NASA Administrator to be on hand at the White House when President Obama honored her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom last year. It was well deserved.

Katherine Johnson is now a retired mathematician from our Langley Research Center, whose computations influenced space exploration efforts from Mercury through the shuttle program.

She worked at Langley from1953 to 1986 and was one of a number of African-American women who worked as human computers for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), the agency that preceded NASA.

Katherine blazed a trail that others have followed, and I'm happy to have her family here today to see once again, how strong her legacy remains. I'd like to ask Mrs. Johnson's family to come forward to receive this recognition on behalf of Katherine Johnson.